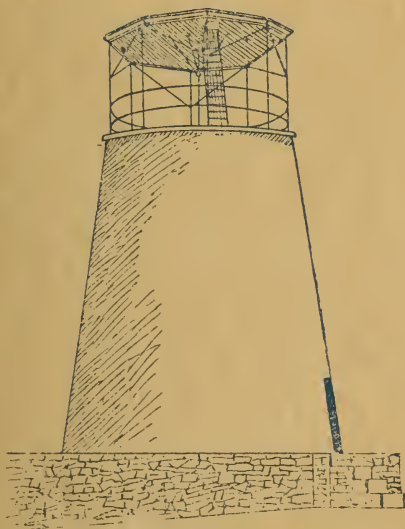


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History of the First Monument to George Washington



WASHINGTON MONUMENT

As Memorial appeared before it fell prey to
ravages of the elements.

HISTORICAL SKETCH
of the
FIRST MONUMENT TO GEORGE
WASHINGTON

BY
HARVEY S. BOMBERGER



On South Mountain, near
Boonsboro, Maryland

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Author
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THE traveler going westward on the old national pike ten or twelve miles south of Hagerstown, Maryland, nearly midway between that city and Frederick, after he has passed down over the mountain, and just before he has reached the town of Boonesboro, will notice on a prominent knob of the range an irregular pile of masonry with just enough of order to suggest the ruins of a structure of some size. He will be told in answer to his inquiry concerning it that it is the ruins a second time of a monument to Washington. The use of the indefinite article is hardly unwarranted, for this monument, since its building more than three-quarters of a century ago and its rebuilding in 1882, has in all this time been so much in a state of dilapidation that it has escaped the observation it has deserved and which its position was intended to give to it. It is doubtless due to this that it has generally been unknown and unrecognized as one of the historic structures, not of the section merely, but of the country as a whole. The date of its building, the motives that raised it, the manner of its erection, its proportions and its position overlooking so prominently

the then great national highway, entitle it to more than a local consideration.

This monument which has the established distinction of being the first erected to Washington in the country, was built by the citizens of Boonesboro in 1827. The town is an old one, its founding dating back to 1787, and at the time had grown into an organized community of four or five hundred people. Directly to the east of it rises a peak or fold of the mountain twelve hundred feet above the valley, that stands out alone, and that reaches down to the town itself. It was on the well defined summit of this elevation that the structure was placed. In front of the monument, making a crown to the mountain are five or six acres of huge stone formation, known in the early land records as Blue Rocks. Many of the rocks are immense boulders. They are a grey granite mass and so deep is the bed that vegetation has never pierced it. Covered with a dense growth of lichen they present an aspect looking immediately down that is singularly wild. Stretching far into the west is an extensive scene of wonderful charm. Farm after farm of well tilled land, outlined yet by the unfortunately fast

disappearing post and rail fence, here and there thrifty orchards of peach and apple and patches of primeval oaks, extending dimly to the North mountain thirty miles away with the haze of the Potomac winding midway between, and in the midst the beautiful National Cemetery at Sharpsburg, make the view picturesque and beautiful to a degree worthy of its association.

Tradition has it that the building of the memorial was a political demonstration of the adherents of the democratic party of the times, but the fact that the undertaking was made on the 4th of July would seem to give the inspiration a wider and more general source. It was doubtless a manifestation of the patriotic ardor that prevailed throughout the country at the time as the result of the political excitement of which Adams, Clay, Jackson and others were the energetic factors.

The fame of the Commander-in-Chief of the Revolution, and first president of the republic had by this time grown to an amplitude in which criticism was hushed and the nobility of his character and his greatness as a general and statesman had become fixed in the minds and hearts of every citizen of

the nation. Washington's great title of the Father of his Country had already become a household word. It was therefore time and fitting that a memorial should be erected to him. He had been dead twenty-five years. The establishment of the new government was felt to be secure. The blessings of a free country were being enjoyed, and the dream of empire as it fired the imaginations of the representative men of the times had reached down and infused itself into the life of the remotest citizen. The experiences of the struggle for independence had not yet ceased to be handed down by those who had directly taken part in it, and it is told that one or two of those whose hands laid the foundation stones were aged survivors of the revolutionary army. It would be interesting and honorable indeed to his descendants to know who it was that first conceived of the memorial, to have a report of the public meeting at which it was proposed and discussed, who composed the committee to arrange for the work, what masons plied the hammer and trowel. All this is lost as well as nearly all the lesser incidents that would enable the story to be told as it could be wished. The Torch Light of Hagerstown, bearing

the date of July, 1827, made a report of the event which comprises the historical record of it. The account contains the following:

“Washington Monument, near Boonesboro.

“Pursuant to previous arrangements, the citizens of Boonesboro assembled at the public square on the fourth inst., at half past seven o'clock in the morning, to ascend the ‘Blue Rocks’ for the patriotic purpose of erecting a monument to the memory of him whose name stands at the head of this article. This spot was selected in consequence of the great facility with which the materials were furnished. A little more than the foundation had been laid the day before, which enabled us to proceed without delay to the grand design before us. The men seemed actuated by a spirit of zeal and ardor almost bordering on enthusiasm.

“About 12 o'clock we heard a very appropriate extempore address from the Rev. Mr. Clinghan, a gentleman of the Revolutionary period, whose warm patriotism, animating a constitution rendered infirm by age and bad health, induced him to bear all fatigue and danger to accomplish the purpose of his heart.

"About 1 o'clock we partook of a cold collation, as our object was not to gratify our pampered appetites; consequently no sumptuous arrangements had been made, neither were toasts prepared for the occasion, but we enjoyed more heartfelt satisfaction in partaking of our simple fare than the most costly or highly seasoned dishes would have afforded. Our thoughts and food were both highly spiced with the contemplation of our work, thereby needing no stimulants to excite an artificial appetite. At the conclusion of our labors, about 4 o'clock, the Declaration of Independence was read from one of the steps of the monument, preceded by some prefatory observations, after which several salutes of infantry were fired, when we all returned to town in good order.

"This monument is fifty-four feet in circumference at its base and fifteen feet high (we contemplate raising it thirty feet after the busy season has passed). The wall is composed of huge stone, many weighing upwards of a ton, with the whole of the center filled up with the same material. A flight of steps, commencing at the base and running through the body of the fabric, enables us to ascend to the top, from whence the most beautiful prospect

presents itself that the eye can possibly behold. Shepherdstown, Hagerstown, and Cavetown are distinctly seen, with all the fertile fields of Jefferson, Berkeley and Washington counties, affording a landscape teeming with life and wealth.

"To the summit of this mountain is a rugged path, but the view will afford a rich compensation for the labor. Twelve feet from the base, upon the side fronting Boonesboro, was inserted a white marble slab, with the following inscription:

"'Erected in memory of Washington, July 4, 1827, by the citizens of Boonesboro.

"'At the laying of the monument several Revolutionary soldiers ascended and fired three rounds from its top.'"

Rev. William Clinghan, D. D., mentioned above, was a clergyman of the Episcopal Church and at the time of his participation in the dedication was living retired in Boonesboro. The house occupied by him is still standing. He died in 1833 and his grave is in the old burying ground adjoining the Reformed Church in that place.

In 1882 there remained, as indeed for many years before, only a fallen ruin of the original monument. As

late as 1876 the marble slab bearing the inscription could be seen from the town. About this time it disappeared, and is doubtless stored away by some one who removed it to save it from the total destruction that seemed to threaten the pile, and to preserve it for some future restoration. In 1882 a movement originated with the LaGrange Lodge of Odd Fellows of Boonesboro to rebuild the monument. The project instantly met with a hearty response from the people of the locality, and steps were at once taken to provide the necessary funds. By subscription and some public efforts a sufficient sum was raised and the monument was restored to a height of thirty feet with the interior stairway again to the top. The rededication of it took place on August 18th of that year in the presence of a concourse of 3000 people. The occasion was made notable by the presence of a number of distinguished men of Maryland and elsewhere, including the Governor of the State, Wm. T. Hamilton, who addressed the assemblage. The orator of the day was Frederick T. Nelson, of Frederick, who delivered an eloquent oration.

A roadway to the point accessible to carriages was constructed, and it re-

mained passable for a number of years. The upper portion has now become overgrown from disuse, but the outline of it can still be seen. The grade is of very moderate ascent. The larger part of the roadway is now one of the public roads of Washington county, and is regularly maintained by annual appropriation.

Ten years after its rebuilding, on account of faulty construction or possibly from a stroke of lightning, a rent appeared in the stonework, which rapidly grew, causing the monument to fall again to its former ruin. In this condition it has since remained. A large part of the original stonework is now standing, including the stairway. A movement is again being contemplated by the town of Newburgh to have

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self to the "Washington" monument.

There is a "Washington" hat appeals to the imagination to learn of this patriotic enterprise on the part of the early citizens who undertook it. To place

the first or indeed any monument to the hero of the Revolution and the great first President of the nation on the peak of a mountain in bold view of the great national highway and at the time, the avenue to the then wide unsettled west, was an act of no small conception and deserves the recognition of the people of the entire country.

There are larger monuments to Washington and to countless other great patriots, but of no one of them can it be said that its foundation was laid in purer, stronger, more reverent patriotism, in more genuine love of country or in truth conceived in grander proportions.

It is worthy even in its decay of the greatness it was built to commemorate and it should stand again in permanent form. Our American nation cannot too much keep before it the high ideals of Washington, nor too jealously preserve the memorials of his magnificent fame.



The First Washington Monument

Of old thou stood, a watcher lone,
Upon the silent height;
Strong as the Heart at Valley Forge,
That watched in frozen night.
For in thee glowed the pulse that timed,
The march of Freedom's feet;
Fed by the flood of hero blood,
It ne'er shall cease to beat.

The hands, within whose sturdy veins
The patriot thrill coursed free;
Raised up thy sentinel form to him
Who wrought for Liberty.
Those hands are stilled, but oh, the throb
Hath never ceased in rest;
It vibrates down the path of Time,
And echoes in each breast.

Though shattered once by storm and age,
Yet Nature wove thee round;
A flowery, fragrant memory,
Embraced thee from the ground.
The fair, wild blossoms kissed thy form,
The birds sang o'er thy stone;
The stars in night's emblazoned flag,
Kept watch with thee alone.

And now once more thy form shall stand,
Grim Veteran of the past;
Like Liberty, though crushed to earth,
It must arise at last.
For when the thrill of grateful love,
Shall o'er us cease to steal;
'Twill be because our Soul is dead,
And hearts have ceased to feel.

—Isabel S. Mason in
Hagerstown Herald.

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